

RELEASED IN FULL

**Communiqué of the Presidency of the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference**

The Presidency of the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference (CEV) wishes to make the following public statement.

1. For more than two years we have requested, through various channels, to be received by the President of the Republic, without success. Recently, on the occasion of the visit of the Holy Father in October 2001, the President himself said that he had asked to receive the Episcopal Conference. During the ordinary assembly of the Episcopate last January 8, all the bishops signed a letter, reiterating our desire to dialogue with the President. Furthermore, last Wednesday, January 16, at the request of the President of the Moral Council of the Republic, the members of the Council met at the Apostolic Nunciature, with the Nuncio and with Msgr. Jose Luis Azuaje, General Secretary of the CEV for more than two hours, and in a peaceful and respectful atmosphere. In the course of this meeting, Msgr. Azuaje informed the members of the Council that the most recent request had been submitted the previous week. Given the closeness in time, the members of the Council kindly agreed to see to it that it was delivered once again to the President.

2. Last Tuesday, January 22, at the end of the day, the Minister of the Secretariat of the Presidency informed the Nuncio by telephone that the audience would take place on Tuesday, January 29 at 11:00 in the morning. After informing the members of the CEV Presidency, the General Secretary confirmed with the Minister the agreement to the audience.

On Thursday the 24<sup>th</sup>, at the beginning of the ceremonial greetings of the President by the Diplomatic Corps, and before the respective discourses, the Nuncio personally thanked the President for his willingness to receive the members of the CEV Presidency.

For our part, we also wish to register our appreciation for this gesture.

3. Nevertheless, the recent actions, judgments and denigrating statements of the President and of some members of the government are completely unacceptable. These have been directed not only at the Cardinal, the Nuncio and the Catholic hierarchy, but have also been directed to the Church itself, that is, the People of God, which is to say the vast majority of our Venezuelan people.

4. Therefore, in conscience and before God and our people whom we serve, we consider that the conditions necessary so that the dialogue which is the object of this meeting might contribute to the common good of the Venezuela people, are lacking.

5. We repeat today what we recently said in our Collective Exhortation, "Dialogue: The Way to Peace" (Caracas, January 11, 2002): "We are not at the service of factions or groupings; we are interested only in the good of the country, immersed as we are in the communities, there where the people live and work. We have been called to be messengers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; we have a mission that he has given us, to be bearers of the peace and reconciliation that Christ

came to bring."

6. Coincidentally, on a day like today in 1985, the Holy Father John Paul II said to us in the Cathedral of Caracas: "Given that you have (in addition to precious natural resources so that all can have a worthy life) a democratic tradition that affirms your stability, you are responsible for promoting ever more the dignity and the participation of the people in the future of the nation, a model overcoming authoritarianisms of whatever ideological type...Therefore, out of your situation...you must be in the vanguard in the building of a country faithful to its Catholic traditions, prosperous in freedom and justice, strict and diligent in your responsibilities, aware of the needs of the weakest and most oppressed, in solidarity with neighboring peoples and nations...lovers of an authentic cultural progress.:

With gratitude, we recall these guiding and urgent words of His Holiness.

7. Once again we raise our prayer to God who is good and merciful, through His Son. Our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the intercession of our Mother, Our Lady of Coromoto, in this Jubilee Year of her apparition, so that the grace of peace, of liberty, of justice, and of unity in solidarity may enlighten and strengthen the sentiments, projects and wills of all the Venezuelan people.

Caracas, January 28, 2002

+Baltazar E. Porras Cardozo  
Archbishop of Mérida  
President of the CEV

Ignacio Cardinal A. Velasco García  
Archbishop of Caracas  
First Vice President of the CEV

+Ubaldo R. Santana Sequera  
Archbishop of Maracaibo  
Second Vice President of the CEV

Father Aldo Fonti Verni  
Sub-Secretary of the CEV